

Jordanian terrorist Abu Musab al-Zarqawi:

The Muslim masses . . . do not rally except against an outside occupying enemy.

Our military and diplomatic leaders understand that countering this vicious propaganda requires clear signals about our intentions in Iraq. And they have done just this.

General George Casey, the ground force commander in Iraq, told the Committee on Armed Services last September:

Increased coalition presence feeds the notion of occupation.

At the same hearing, General John Abizaid, the commander of all U.S. troops in the Middle East, told Congress:

We must make clear to the people of the region we have no designs on their territory or resources.

In March, the American ambassador to Iraq, Zalmay Khalilzad, told an Iraqi television station that the United States has "no goal in establishing permanent bases in Iraq."

Unfortunately, this clarity has been clouded by mixed messages from the senior-most decision-makers in the Bush administration.

To my knowledge, President Bush has never explicitly stated that we will not establish permanent bases in Iraq, and both the Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of State have left the door open to do just that.

On February 17, 2005, Secretary Rumsfeld told the Committee on Armed Services:

We have no intention, at the present time, of putting permanent bases in Iraq.

"At the present time" is not exactly an unequivocal statement.

On February 15, 2006, at the Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing, my friend, the Senator from Massachusetts, asked Secretary Rice:

Is it, in fact, the policy of the administration not to have permanent bases in Iraq?

Rather than answering the simple one word, "Yes," Secretary Rice said during a 400 word exchange on the question:

I don't want to in this forum try to prejudice everything that might happen way into the future.

Just last Thursday, columnist Helen Thomas asked the White House press secretary to unambiguously declare that the United States will not seek permanent bases in Iraq. Again, the press secretary could not unequivocally declare this to be the case.

These mixed messages are confusing to the American people and the Iraqi people alike. They feed conspiracy theories and cede rhetorical space to our enemies. They make it that much more difficult to win the battle for the hearts and minds of 1.2 billion Muslims in the world. Our success in that battle will determine our success in the struggle between freedom and radical fundamentalism.

Against this backdrop, I believe that it is incumbent upon us to speak where the administration has not.

My amendment will have no detrimental effect on the military operations of our Armed Forces in Iraq or their ability to provide security for Iraqi oil infrastructure.

United Nations Council Resolution 1546 recognizes that the American and coalition forces are present in Iraq at the invitation of the Iraqi Government and that their operations are essential to Iraq's political, economic, and social well-being.

In his first speech to the Iraqi parliament last month, Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki endorsed that resolution. We are anxious for the day when Iraqis can take control of their own destiny, but the Iraqis are suspicious of our intentions and growing increasingly impatient.

This amendment may not in itself change a lot of minds on the ground or in the region.

But it can mark the beginning of a sustained effort to demonstrate through words and deeds that we have no intention of controlling Iraq's oil or staying there forever.

I believe it is our duty to do so.

I want to point out a couple of things. I have listened to some of this debate. Sometimes I wonder whether we are debating the Levin amendment or not. The Levin-Reed amendment says two things. It lays out a plan. The front part of it is the part that is being ignored by most people. The amendment lays out a specific plan to avoid trading a dictatorship for chaos in Iraq. Right now, I respectfully suggest the President has a plan how not to lose but no plan how to win. In my view, a plan to arbitrarily set a date to leave is not a plan. It is an expression of overwhelming frustration and maybe on the part of some a conclusion reached that it is not winnable because it has been so badly handled the last 2 years. I respect that position. I don't agree with it, but I respect it.

The fact is, what is before us in the Levin amendment is it first calls for a political settlement and the sharing of economic resources. That is another way of saying the Iraqis need a deal on oil that gives the Sunnis a fair share of the revenues; and, secondly, it calls for the President to convene what not just JOE BIDEN and this amendment but BIDEN before, and before that Henry Kissinger, and Secretary Shultz and others called for, and that is convening of an international conference to promote a durable political settlement and reduce the interference by Iraq's neighbors in Iraq. And it calls for the things that everyone agrees have to be done, purging the sectarian militia which has infiltrated the security forces.

My friend from Missouri stood up and talked about the Iraqi security forces. The Iraqi security forces are riddled with sectarian infiltration. There is overwhelming evidence that Sadr suggests his Mahdi militia join the military. There is overwhelming evidence that the SCIRI and Dawa Parties have

moved their people into the military as have the Sadr militia. There is evidence of the fact that the Peshmerja are in the north. So let me ask a question: How is it remotely possible that this government, assuming it is really good government, has a lot of personal courage and wisdom?

How can it run a country when it does not have a military that—at least at any one time—one-third of the country doesn't trust?

Did you all notice what happened today? Saddam's defense lawyer, for whom I have no particular empathy or sympathy—guess what. Five cops or four cops—Iraqi police—show up with identification, take him away, and shoot him.

What has been going on? Pick up the paper. Every day—almost every day for the past months—a bus gets stopped, a group of Iraqi policemen take people off the bus identified as Sunnis and blow their brains out; or the next morning—every morning—you read the paper. What do you find? You find 9, 12, or 30 Sunnis handcuffed with bullets in their heads.

So I ask you the question, imagine the United States of America trying to unite the North and the South, and if you had hit squads in the South after the Civil War going after anybody who fought in the Confederacy—this is a big deal.

There is no possibility of avoiding a civil war, in my humble opinion, if you don't purge the police and then purge the military of the sectarian thugs.

Second, we have a very first-rate Ambassador there. The best thing that has happened to our effort is our present Ambassador. What did he do? Remember when he said the first unity government wasn't legitimate because the Sunnis didn't participate? It was a legitimate point. How do we get the Sunnis to participate in the election? You had the acting Parliament pass a law defining what could kill the Constitution—changing the law. That is a disaster.

So what did our Ambassador do? He said: Change it—quietly; a brilliant diplomatic move. They changed the law going back to what it had been under the law that was written in the first instance. Second, what did he do? He said: This isn't the final document. They amended the Constitution at the last minute it was being voted on to say you can amend it later. Why? For a specific purpose. Everybody knows that unless you get the Sunnis to buy in, there is no possibility of success. So everyone has anticipated from the beginning, beginning with our Ambassador, that you have to amend the Constitution to give the Sunnis a piece of the action.

Up to now, our administration has been saying quietly that would be divisive absent the Parliament doing what is called for under the law, convening, as they should be now, and now with about 3 months left, reporting to the entire Parliament amendments to the